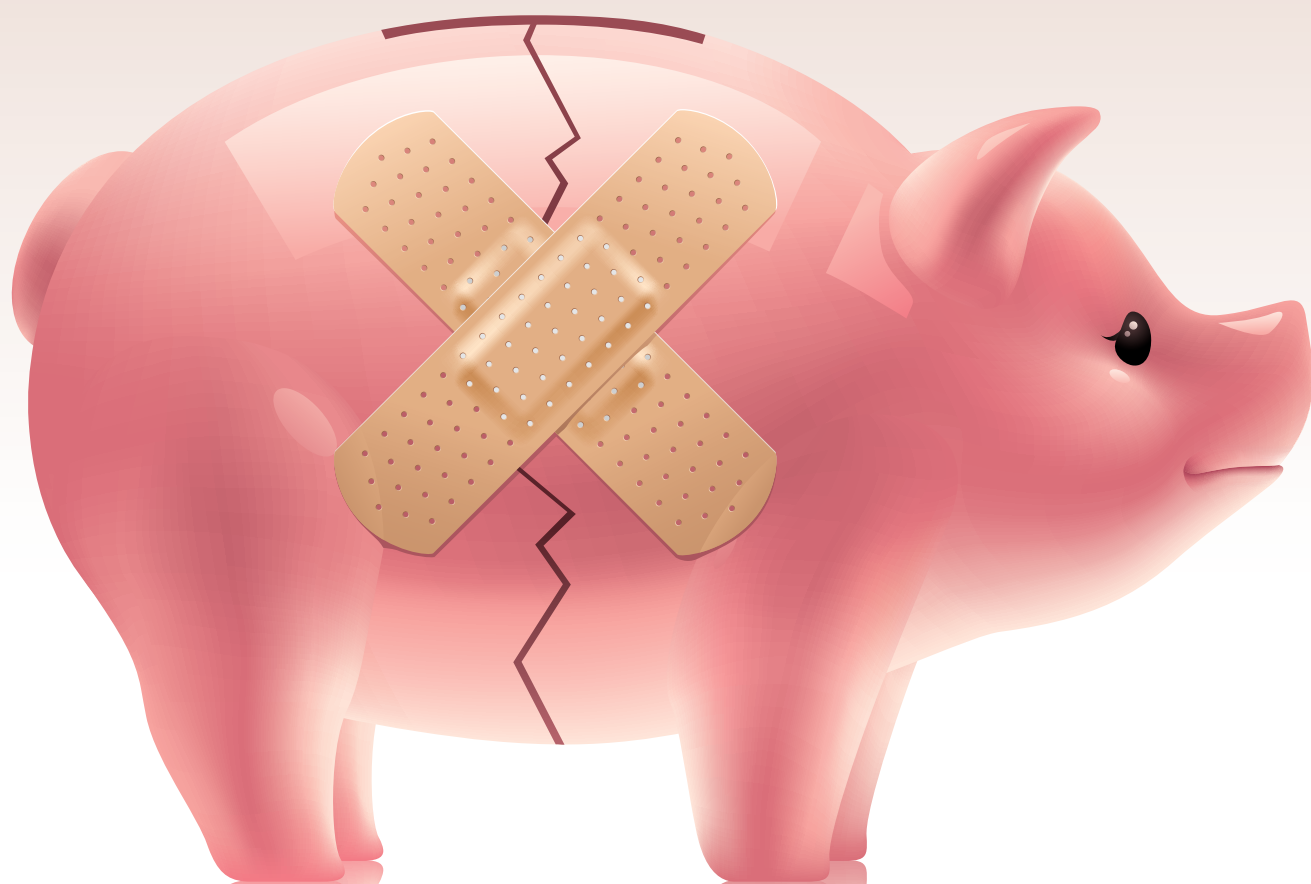


By Rich Kiker

How to Pay for Your One-to-One



Think there's no way you can find the funding to start a one-to-one program? Here are a few creative ways any district can get the distributed computing program of its dreams—and pay for it too.

Program

These days, school district budgets are getting hit on both sides: State budgets are facing drastic cuts across the United States at the same time that many schools are dealing with rising insurance premiums and retirement fund payouts. It's no wonder that technology is often an early casualty in district fiscal planning. Unfortunately, in this environment, many schools see one-to-one computing as an unattainable fantasy.

But there is a way! With a little creativity and innovative design, a one-to-one model that meets the needs of every student, embraces digital age instruction, and prepares students for robust and dynamic careers is within reach.

Pennsylvania school districts have been inspired by the Classrooms for the Future (CFF) initiative that Holly Jobe, ISTE's board president, manages. Part of each CFF partner school district's responsibility is to create a sustainability plan to ensure that its one-to-one initiative grows and flourishes long after the funding period is over. This requirement has inspired many technology coaches and project managers to get creative to make this happen.

Two proven ideas are technology purchase programs and donor programs. Read on to find out how they work and how you can implement them to make one-to-one computing a reality in your school.



Technology Purchase Program

An inventive idea that addresses many budgetary concerns is a technology purchase program. Schools sometimes overlook the leverage they can wield in the marketplace. It often takes only a few phone calls to major vendors to start a conversation about discounts.

In 2010, my team at Palisades School District in Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, contacted vendors to research pricing and plan options for a custom program. We found that, not only were they eager to offer advantages to our school community, they were willing to extend those benefits to everyone with an address in our district. That meant we had a unique opportunity to bring great pricing and a model of new learning to our entire population. Needless to

say, the community not only accepted this plan, they embraced it.

We chose a vendor and selected equipment that would work well with our wireless network, had superior reliability reviews, and was available at a manageable price point.

Some of the incentives that Palisades built into its purchase program include:

- Equipment discounts resulting from leveraged purchasing power
- Extended support and warranties to relieve technical concerns
- A range of computing options, including laptops, netbooks, tablet devices, and other mobile computing solutions, starting as low as \$200
- Significant discounts on software packages, including Microsoft products
- Customized ordering pages and plans that can link directly to school websites and be embedded in email notifications
- Purchasing permissions for all community members and taxpayers
- Technical guidance for families when they purchase computing equipment

We found out that it is rare for vendors to place restrictions that allow only students to purchase equipment. Under our plan, all taxpayers can buy equipment with all the advantages we negotiated for the students. This is a powerful way to add value not only to the learning population, but also to everyone who contributes to your district's success.

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Donor Programs

The concept of equity should be at the forefront of everyone's mind. What about the students and families who cannot afford to purchase their own computing devices? How do we prevent our own local versions of the digital divide? Maintaining the status quo would be a great disservice to the families who may have the greatest need for an affordable, school-sanctioned program. Once again, we need to employ both perseverance and creativity!

Reach out to the local school community to establish donor programs to which families can anonymously apply for assistance in purchasing equipment. Many parent-teacher groups and school foundations perform exactly this mission. In our area, the Palisades Community Foundation has always been a committed supporter of school programs, and I would encourage all districts to closely partner with similar groups.

Another funding idea is to reach out to local businesses to support the donor fund. You can ask for a direct donation of cash or equipment, or you can request that they donate a new student netbook for every 10 computers purchased with the purchase-plan discounts. You can also establish a partnership with the local chamber of commerce to build and promote local business buy-in. Again, a little persuasiveness and hard work can generate a

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lot of interest and return dividends for students in need.

Technology and student support teams can also supplement the donor funding. The Media Technology Academy (MTA) is a technology pathway program at Palisades. The MTA students have long been involved in helping faculty, staff, and students with troubleshooting, and this program has given them additional opportunities to get hands-on experience and hone their technical skills as a "student help desk." As chair of the MTA at Palisades, I encouraged and supported student involvement in community affairs as often as possible, including helping small businesses. Designing websites, building databases for local churches, and helping the senior center write its bylaws are a few of the many local projects that our students lead.

One venture that MTA students worked on was creating a marketing website and print advertising materials for a local group of many small businesses in the area. The students did such a good job that the businesses returned for their help with brochures, websites, social media, and much more. Without exception, these organizations wanted to pay the students. Although the students couldn't accept payment, we did suggest that the businesses give to our donor fund instead. Think of how students could be empowered in this scenario!

The Place for Investment

Many districts still lack the infrastructure to support one-to-one computing. If this sounds like your district, you will have to make a small initial investment for wireless network upgrades, access points, or firewall upgrades. But these are minor startup costs that you can easily recoup in the

long term. Besides, is that outdated PC lab from 2005 in the science wing with broken printers and duct-taped monitors helping anyone?

Ideally, schools can phase out more than half of their fixed computer labs, which should reduce the pressure on technicians and keep the remaining computer labs functioning at a high level so they can support classes such as computer science and digital arts. Using fewer, more mobile solutions will also reduce electricity costs, streamline the technology support process, and open the door for new district purchases, such as thin-client computing and affordable mobile labs to meet the needs of all students, including those without their own devices.

One upside is that schools will be able to remodel the physical space to more efficiently meet their needs. Space is a valuable commodity in schools! For example, if a high school can eliminate six computer labs by moving to a mobile environment, it can open up work areas for new purposes, with benefits such as flexible programming and fewer scheduling roadblocks.

The long-term savings associated with a slimmer, more efficient physical infrastructure will provide extra funds. One option is to reinvest these savings into the donor program. You can also use the savings to create less expensive mobile sets of tablets or netbooks that students can use during the school day.

Positive Learning Opportunities

Rebuilding your technology program brings with it all sorts of possibilities. Students can gain experience and confidence by leading first-tier technical support teams. You can also solicit community involvement, such as

bringing in local experts to speak, to enhance the learning process for the students. Conversely, you can use your facilities to give back to the community as well. Palisades offers extended and adult learning opportunities in its labs. As the purchase program grows, we hope to expand these learning programs with an infusion of technology and new media topics, which may also help fund the programs.

Developing globally competent students has also been an essential piece of the Palisades mission for some time now. Putting tools directly into the students' hands will create an inviting atmosphere for broader videoconferencing, international classroom collaboration, and social media connections to help our students grow as global citizens.

And don't forget the employees. Human resources have always been and will continue to be the most valuable asset for any organization. Let's not underestimate the level of empowerment our teachers and administrators can reach if they have such an environment for teaching and leading. We have all seen what talented educators can do with a working copier or an overhead projector. What if their students had instant access to all the dynamic technology discussed in this article?

The possibilities are endless. With a little investment and a lot of elbow grease, our districts can become the change agents we so desperately need to keep education relevant.



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